

Buzzfeed Unsolved: The Vanishing of Will Byers by KamiJe Celeek

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Summary: What really happened to Will Byers on that night in November 1983? The Ghoul Boys look into this old Indiana case.

Buzzfeed Unsolved: The Vanishing of Will Byers

Random story inspired by BuzzFeed Unsolved—my favorite true crime/supernatural show. Also, written in preparation for the season 5 premiere of True Crime on March 22, 2019.

Ryan: This week on BuzzFeed Unsolved, we're going to be discussing the mysterious disappearance—and return—of Will Byers.

Shane: Return? You mean this guy actually came back?

Ryan: Yeah. He was missing for a week, but they found him and brought him back.

Shane: Well, why is it unsolved if he's home and dandy?

Ryan: It's not so much his disappearance that's the mystery; rather, it's what *surrounded* his disappearance. Because he wasn't the only person in his town that went missing that week, but... you'll see. Let's get into it.

Ryan, Narrator voice: It was November 6, 1983, in Hawkins, Indiana. A quiet town where nothing much seemed to happen. But that was to change when Will Byers, a twelve-year-old boy, seemingly vanished into thin air.

Shane: What, like the kid just... *poofed*?

Ryan: It's a little more complicated than that.

Ryan, Narrator voice: That night, around 9 PM, Will was biking home after a night of playing Dungeons & Dragons at his friend's, Mike Wheeler. At some point on his way home, Will crashed his bike and from there, he apparently ran through the woods back to his house. From there, the details are murky at best, but the fact remains that Will was missing the next morning.

Shane: Okay, so kid crashes his bike on the way home, and runs the rest of the way... and he disappears?

Ryan: Well, like I said, the details are murky. There was evidence found that he *did* make it to the house, but nothing to suggest what happened after.

Shane: What kind of evidence?

Ryan, Narrator voice: On the morning of November 7, Will's mother Joyce Byers asked his sixteen-year-old brother Jonathan to wake up Will for school. Jonathan did as his mother asked, only to find his younger brother wasn't in his bed. Joyce made a call to the Wheelers to ask if perhaps Will had spent the night without telling her. The response from Karen Wheeler—Mike's mother—was that she'd seen Will bike away from the house towards his home. Understandably, Joyce was upset and went down to the police station to talk to the chief about her son's disappearance.

Before we get into the details of the investigation, it is important to note several things about the three Byers involved in this story. Joyce was raising Jonathan and Will alone after divorcing her husband, Lonnie. Jonathan was something of a loner and this factored into different rumors about the whole case. Will was also a quiet boy, but he had three close friends at the time of his disappearance: Mike Wheeler, Dustin Henderson, and Lucas Sinclair.

Shane: So Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas were a little D&D group who got together for campaigns, and Will went missing on the way home from one of these campaigns. Not to mention that his parents were separated. Nobody thought the kid went to his dad's or something?

Ryan: That was one of the theories, yes. That was the first one they investigated, but no, he wasn't there.

Shane: If one of my friends had gone missing when I was twelve, I would've... probably not gone out after him.

Ryan, Narrator voice: The Chief of Police in Hawkins at the time of Will's disappearance was James 'Jim' Hopper, a man who was a noted alcoholic, opioid addict, and womanizer. He didn't take his job seriously, but Joyce forced his hand into looking for her son. An interesting note to make is that many of the chief's habits would disappear *completely* within a year of Will's disappearance. Whether

this is due to finally having something to investigate or a secondary cause that we'll discuss in the theories, nobody knows.

Shane: Okay. One of the most morally-bankrupt people in town is the chief of police. And this *random* single mom just *makes* him look for her son.

Ryan: Actually, according to some stories, Joyce and Hopper had actually dated in high school, and a few years after all this shit, they got married.

Shane: No kidding.

Ryan: It's a weirdly beautiful love story, but sadly, that's not our focus.

Ryan, Narrator voice: Whatever happened that week, it stands that Joyce and Hopper found Will on November 12, about a week after his initial disappearance. Now, let's get into the most fun part of this case: the theories.

Shane: Before you start with the theories, let me just say that... I think this kid just got lost in the woods. I mean he's young, he's not a tough kid, and he's the child of divorce. Who's to say that he didn't just crash his bike and run off into the woods to avoid telling his mom that he busted his bike?

Ryan: That's the thing, though—his bike was completely intact when they found it the next morning. And, uh, his dad had no clue where he was. His mother always said that her younger son was a very sweet and sensitive boy who would never put off telling her anything like that, so she knew something was wrong.

Ryan, Narrator voice: The first theory is the official story that was told to the people of Hawkins—Will Byers got lost in the woods and was found by his mother and the chief of police. And while this theory *sounds* like the most likely option, it is most likely bullshit.

Shane: Of course it is.

Ryan, Narrator voice: There were a number of strange occurrences around Hawkins that week, and almost a year later. All of them

seemed to focus around either the Byers family or Chief Hopper. One of these strange occurrences was in the Byers family home. A phone call ended up almost electrocuting Joyce and frying the phone itself, leading to her insisting that, quote, 'that was Will. I heard him breathing. You think I don't know my own son's breathing?' end quote. She bought Christmas lights enmasse and hung them around the house in an attempt to communicate with Will, who she claimed was in the lights and trying to talk to her.

Shane: Did *anybody* think this lady had mental health problems?

Ryan: She had anxiety problems in the past, but nothing that would make her hallucinate the lights. And, uh, she was the person who insisted that Will was alive, even when a body was found in the quarry—

Shane: They found a fucking *body*?!

Ryan, Narrator voice: On November 8, two days after Will disappeared, a body was found in the quarry by State Patrol officer David O'Bannon. It was assumed to be Will's as no other child of that age had gone missing. However, it was later revealed that the body was a fake and full of stuffing. Joyce had refused to admit that the body was her son from the beginning and refused to sign the death certificate.

Shane: Wait. Wait wait wait wait. The body was *fake*?!

Ryan: Yes.

Shane: Okay, I like clear-cut stories as much as anybody, but somebody wanted everyone to think Will was dead. That much is obvious and I'm not sure I want to know who came up with that little conspiracy.

Ryan, Narrator voice: The second theory is related to a second disappearance in Hawkins that same week. Sixteen-year-old Barbara Holland had been at a small get-together thrown by the 'king' of the local high school, Steve Harrington. Also in attendance to this get-together was Barbara's best friend and Steve's girlfriend, Nancy Wheeler.

Shane: Wheeler. Wasn't one of Will's friends named Wheeler?

Ryan: Mike. And yes, he and Nancy are related. She's his older sister.

Shane: It's extremely unfortunate that both their best friends went missing in the same week.

Ryan: Actually, it was the day after Will went missing. So very unfortunate for the Wheeler kids.

Ryan, Narrator voice: Barbara went missing after that party and her car was found the next day where it had been parked for her and Nancy to go to the party. Nancy had no idea where her friend might have gone, but she insisted that, quote, 'Barb would never do that. She loves her family too much to leave them.' End quote. She has also said that, quote, 'Nobody seemed to take the fact that my best friend was missing seriously. Nowhere *near* as seriously as they took Will's. Maybe it was because she was older, but it's my fault. If I hadn't asked her to come with me to Steve's, she'd still be alive.' End quote.

Shane: Quite a bit of guilt years down the road.

Ryan: This was a year later that she said this. And she'd broken up with Steve by that point because she was sick of pretending that everything was okay.

Shane: Somebody get this girl some therapy.

Ryan, Narrator voice: A year later, the Hawkins National Laboratory admitted that they had been involved in Barb's death and the cover-up that followed. According to the official report, Barbara, quote, 'died from exposure to an experimental chemical asphyxiant that had leaked from the grounds of the lab.' Though, once again, this theory is considered bullshit by many who are invested in this case.

The third theory is that the Russians were involved.

Shane: What.

Ryan, Narrator voice: Hawkins National Laboratory was a military lab where they developed weapons to fight the ongoing cold war. That week in Hawkins, rumors of a 'Russian girl' flew due to people

spotting a little girl with a shaved head in the woods near Hawkins. The few that interacted with this girl reported that she didn't speak English very well, and that she was usually wearing an odd set of clothing. Supporters of this theory claim that she and other Russian sleeper agents in Hawkins were behind the disappearances of both Will and Barbara, and that they let Will go due to his young age. Barbara was brought back to Russia where she lives to this day, if the theory is correct.

Shane: Nope. I don't think so.

Ryan: Why not?

Shane: I mean... if you've kidnapped two people—both of whom are under the age of eighteen—why would you only let *one* go? Either you let them *both* go or you take them both back to Russia.

Ryan: That's why I don't particularly like this theory. So much about it just doesn't add up and I don't think that the Russians would've sent sleeper agents to a tiny town in Indiana.

Ryan, Narrator voice: The fourth theory has to do with a Hawkins resident who mysteriously appeared less than two years after the vanishing of Will Byers. However, this also ties into the the Russian theory, as this resident is believed to actually be the 'Russian girl'.

Shane: Are you kidding me?

Ryan: I wish I was.

Ryan, Narrator voice: The mysterious resident was named Jane Hopper, and she was the illegitimate fourteen-year-old daughter of Chief Jim Hopper. As the official story for her goes, she lived with her mother in Chicago before her mother's death. She was then sent to live with Chief Hopper by the state. Jane—or 'El', as she was known to close family and friends—was accepted by many in the community and was noted to be a bright, happy, pretty girl who got along well with most other people.

However, she was eyed with suspicion by several due to occurrences that seemed off. For one thing, she was called 'El' by Mike Wheeler,

Dustin Henderson, and Lucas Sinclair alike the first time they supposedly met. Add to this the fact that Mike had apparently hid the 'Russian girl' in his basement during the events of November 1983 and people began to talk.

Shane: I get it's a small town, but do you have to accuse fourteen-year-old girls of being Russian spies? Get a fucking hobby.

Ryan: You don't find it odd that those three boys called her by a nickname the first time they met?

Shane: That is a little weird—I'll admit that.

Ryan: You wanna know something else? She married one of those boys.

Shane: Oh my God.

Ryan: She started dating Mike Wheeler when they were fourteen and apparently they've been attached at the hip ever since.

Shane: Holy shit. This kid is a fucking... I don't even know. He's a nerd. He plays D&D. And somehow he gets this girl that's super pretty and she's a Russian agent? What?

Ryan: *wheeze* Well, love works in mysterious ways. But this relates to the theory.

Ryan, Narrator voice: El is suspected of being involved with Will's disappearance because of a novel that was later written by none other than Mike Wheeler himself. The novel, titled *Stranger Things*, was about a boy who went missing in a small town because of a creature from another dimension and a psychokinetic, telepathic girl who escaped from a lab and was found by the three friends of the boy. It is believed that the girl in the story was El herself and that she opened a gate to another dimension in Hawkins National Laboratory.

Shane: What the *fuck*?

Ryan: I know it sounds crazy, but think about it. The parallels to the Byers case are there, including the fact that the girl in the story had a weird name—Seven. Test subject Seven. And the main character fell

for her and gave her the name Sev.

Shane: So what's El's name, then?

Ryan: Eleven, according to the theories.

Ryan, Narrator voice: In 1971 through 1973, a woman by the name of Theresa 'Terry' Ives began an attempt to sue Hawkins National Laboratory—namely, the head scientist, Doctor Martin Brenner, claiming he'd stolen her infant daughter from her by cutting her out of Terry's belly and faking the baby's death. Though this case did not yield the results Terry wished, it did shut down the project in 1973. What is to be noted is that Terry continued to try and get her daughter back until 1975, when Terry became catatonic and was tragically unable to continue the fight for her daughter. And what was the name of this supposed daughter who'd been stolen? Jane.

Shane: Wait. Wait wait wait wait wait. Are you saying that El is the stolen kid?

Ryan: That's exactly what I'm saying. Think about it. Mysterious girl shows up in town, after rumors of a Russian spy are dying down, and appears to be close to several kids in the town. And this wasn't one or two kids, either; it was *five*.

Shane: So we're talking about Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Will, and...?

Ryan: A girl named Maxine Mayfield, who moved to town almost a year before El supposedly did.

Shane: Hm. It is suspicious. There are a *lot* of questions in this case.

Ryan, Narrator voice: What really happened to Will Byers that night in 1983? Was it simply a case of a child getting lost in the woods? Were he and Barbara Holland kidnapped by Russians? Did Will see something he wasn't supposed to? Or, was this a case of something beyond our understanding, part of another dimension? We may never know. The Vanishing of Will Byers may remain UNSOLVED.

Shane: Now I want to read that book. It sounds interesting.

Ryan: It really is. And the monster who took the kid in the book was

called a Demogorgon. There's supposed to be a sequel in the works, too. That's good because I hated the ending of the first book. Mike Wheeler is seriously skilled as a writer because that ending ripped my fucking heart out and made me cry.

Shane: Sad ending?

Ryan: Bittersweet. A lot of bitter, though. Not going to spoil it here, but... I did legitimately cry.

Shane: Well, then, I'd better go stock up on tissues before I buy this book...

Like I said, this story was meant to be random as hell. *shrugs* I hope you enjoyed it, though!

So long and thanks for all the fish!